

Meeting Date: May 14, 2009

Agenda Item No. 12

Agenda Item: Pelican Management Plan (Action)

Bureau Chief Approval: _____

Prepared by: Rex Sallabanks, Conservation Sciences Program Manager

Background:

Numbers of American white pelicans, including adult nesting birds, have increased dramatically in southern Idaho since 2002. The increase in nesting birds has been documented at Idaho's two primary nesting colonies located on islands in Blackfoot Reservoir and Lake Walcott (Minidoka National Wildlife Refuge). Increases in pelican populations are generally considered as positive contributions to pelican conservation goals in the Western population segment, but the increased number of pelicans has also resulted in documented predation impacts on native cutthroat trout subspecies and other important recreational fisheries. The Department believed there was a need to develop an approach to manage conflicts in Idaho between pelicans and fish populations that balance conservation and recreation interests for both. As such, the draft "Pelican Management Plan" was presented to the Commission at the March meeting and approved for release to the public for a 30-day comment period.

Statutory Authority and/or Policy issues:

The plan establishes management direction and provides objectives for pelican conservation. The plan contains both non-lethal (hazing birds, physical deterrents) and lethal (shooting birds, oiling eggs) management actions. Non-lethal methods could be implemented at any time. Because the American white pelican is federally protected under the Migratory Bird Treaty Act, however, authorization from the USFWS will be required before lethal take can occur. Pending Commission approval of the final plan, the Department will request USFWS authorization to implement lethal control components of the plan.

Public Involvement Process:

The Department opened a 30-day public comment period that ran from April 6 to May 5, 2009. The plan was posted on the Department's website accompanied by several news releases announcing its availability for review. In addition, specific requests for peer review and public input were sent to the USFWS, BLM, western states' fish and wildlife management agencies, tribes, academic institutions, fly-fishing groups, and local Audubon and Trout Unlimited chapters in Idaho. Four public meetings were held the week of April 20 (Pocatello, Soda Springs, Burley, and Hagerman). At the time this gold sheet was prepared – approximately halfway through the public comment period – the Department had received close to 100 comments. At the May 14 meeting, we will provide a summary of the public comments received, open house discussions, review any changes made to the draft plan as a result of public input, and present a final plan to the Commission for approval.

Staff Recommendation:

The Wildlife Bureau seeks Commission approval of the final Pelican Management Plan. If approved, the Department would like direction from the Commission to begin working with the USFWS to obtain the necessary authorization for plan implementation.

Justification:

The Commission sets policy and provides direction, considers input from the public, and has the authority to adopt, amend, or reject Department-recommended plans.